The Last Resort: Island photographer shares images of Maui before the fire

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Body

In the heartbreaking wake of a community lost to fire, a portfolio of photos from Earth Day 2022 takes on new meaning for Arifin Graham.

Inspiration struck the Oak Bay photographer two years ago, to capture images while visiting one of his favourite places – Lahaina, Maui.

The first three images came quickly, he said, an unhoused woman sitting by a public washroom; a man showering outdoors; and two heavily tattooed entrepreneurs making a sign for their flea market the next day.

"It's a touristy town right down by the ocean, but apart from that it was a place where people lived and worked. And it's those people who I really wanted to get a sense of their life and the work they do," Graham said.

The plan all along was to showcase black and white images in a series titled The Last Resort – a nod to The Eagles song of the same name.

Then on Aug. 8, 2023, most of the town of Lahaina burned to the ground.

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It put the images in a new light.

"The photos are historical documents really of a place which is no longer there," Graham said. "This portfolio is a simple reminder, reflected in the faces and places of Lahaina and Maui, of what is now at risk in the time of climate change."

The theme still fits, lyrics of The Last Resort are frequently interpreted as telling the story of human destruction to beautiful lands touted as paradise. Graham notes a town literally called Paradise in California burned in 2018, Lytton B.C. in 2021 and of course Lahaina last year.

"This is where the issue of the environment is really coming home to roost, where we start to lose communities and start to lose people," said Graham. "And it's happening all over the world."

Now the portfolio is a simple reminder, reflected in the faces and places of Lahaina and Maui, of what is at risk in the time of climate change.

The Last Resort is a tribute and testament to a place and vision of paradise lost – for now.

"It may also contain clues for how Lahaina may rise from the ashes of its deeply historical past through the resilience of its current people and community – while preparing for the increasingly uncertain future that we all face," Graham said.

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The Last Resort opens at The Chapel Gallery, 600 Richardson St. on Friday (March 8) from 6 to 8 p.m. with an artist talk at 6:30. The show continues through March 17.

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